

Good evening, my name is Susan Sponheimer and I am the COO of the Childcare Learning Centers of Stamford. I am here this evening speaking on behalf of the Connecticut Head Start Association. I would like to thank the members of the appropriations committee for the opportunity to speak before you tonight.

My testimony tonight focuses on the Governor's budget as it relates to State Head Start funding. The members of the Connecticut Head Start Association appreciate the fact that the Governor proposed only a \$220,000 cut in State Head funds in her budget. These funds are to be eliminated from the Head Start Link line item.

The members of the Connecticut Head Start Association are concerned however about statements made in the narrative portion of the Governor's budget regarding State Head Start funding. According to the budget narrative in recognition of the funds slated for Head Start as part of the stimulus package State Head Start funds could be reduced.

There are some issues with this idea. At this time no one knows how much funding Head Start will receive as part of the stimulus package. How these funds are to be used is still a question; will these funds be allotted to COLA, quality improvement or expansion? If State Head Start funds are reduced with the expectation that these funds will be made up with stimulus dollars be considered supplanting and will that be allowed?

Currently, State Head Start funding provides 444 children whose parents earn less than 100% of poverty with a full-day, full-year comprehensive early childhood education

program. In light of our economic crisis and the fact that as unemployment rises and more families become eligible for Head Start, the state can not afford to decrease the number of children its serves in its State Head Start program.

Over the past few years Head Start programs have not only been flat funded, but they have also seen their federal dollars decreased. Programs such as my own have found it necessary to petition the Head Start Office for a reduction in the number of children they serve, while keeping their funding constant. Should the State decide to reduce its funding to Head Start programs, communities will find themselves in the position of having to reduce their Head Start enrollment for a second year in a row, at time when the communities can least afford it.

The Office of Head Start requires the recipients of Head Start funds to provide a 20% match of their federal funds. Over \$50 million flows into the State for the provision of Head Start. These funds are matched with over \$10 million. Programs in this State use their State Head Start funds as part of their non-federal share. Without this funding, programs will find it very difficult to meet their required match. It would be travesty for this State to lose federal Head Start dollars at a time when the State can least afford it because the program did not have the State dollars to use as their federal match.

For these reasons, it is imperative that the Head Start Services and the Head Start Enhancements line items in the Governor's budget be left intact and not reduced.